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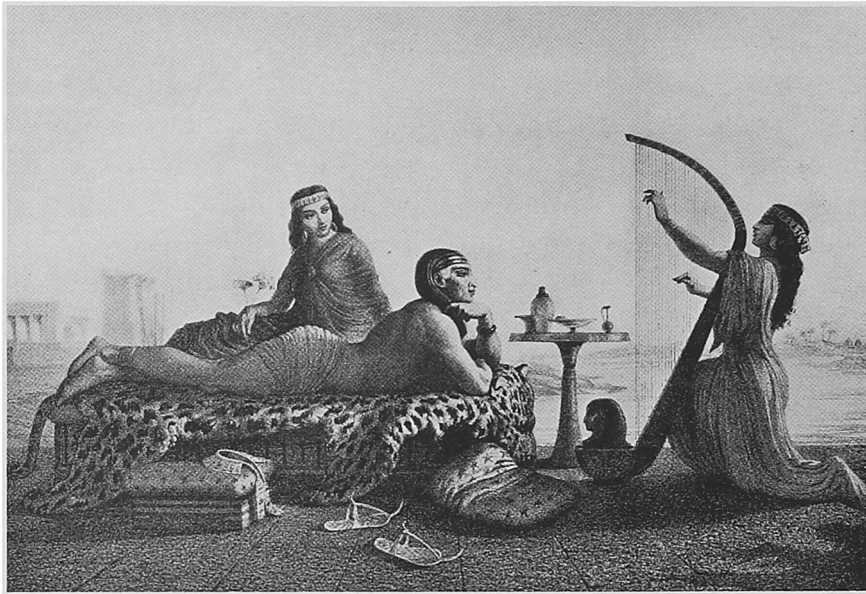
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THE MODERN HARP

They sat entranced as if in some blest dream,
They heard the witching melody of heaven ;
For at the harpist's touch such notes were given—
So sweet and strange, they more than mortal seemed.



“Memphis.” By Papely, Salon, 1845

WRITTEN centuries later than the scene supposed to be transpiring in the picture which forms the head-piece to this article, these lines would apply none the less to harpist and listeners in the ancient Egyptian frescoes of which Papely, in his Salon painting of 1845, has made a clever adaptation under the title of “Memphis.”

The harp in this picture clearly is not the great Egyptian harp. For that stood seven feet in height, its immense frame shimmering with all the colours of the rainbow; its sides curiously veneered with rare wood, or inlaid with ivory, tortoise-shell, and mother of pearl; the sound-board, which had attained the bulk of a massive stand, carried out beyond the body of the harp, and serving as the pedestal for a great sphinx's head, which reared itself nearly half way up the front of the

strings; while sometimes the bust of Pharaoh himself took the place of the sphinx; this always being so with the royal musicians, whose harps glittered with gold and precious stones.

Supposing the ancient frescoes to be correct, and there is no reason to doubt them, the Egyptian harps, which were of various sizes, were beautiful instruments to look at, but they were circumscribed in compass by their very beauty. Their fine curve would not have stood the tension of many strings. The typical Egyptian harp appears to have had only thirteen of these. The modern harp, in grand concert size, which is within an inch of six feet high, has forty-seven, the longest being sixty-two inches. History repeats itself; and while there was a time when the harp, as a solo instrument, lapsed into disuse, today, as in the remote past of

"Memphis," it has again found many devotees both on the concert stage and in the home, and it appeals especially to women, whose charming physical attributes are enhanced by its grace and beauty.

The harp has a long and honourable history, into which, however, it is not necessary to go. As a modern instrument commanding a compass of six and a half octaves, it dates no further back than the invention by Sébastien Erard, in 1810, of the so-called double action harp. Thus, while the medieval harps were small, and suitable for little else than to accompany voices; the modern double action harp is one of the few instruments that is complete in itself. Like the pianoforte and the organ, it requires no accompanying instrument, because both melody and accompaniment can be played on it, its range being practically the same as that of the keyboard of the pianoforte. Its tone has a charm all its own. In glissando effects it simply is unsurpassed and regarding its effectiveness in arpeggio passages, it is only necessary to point out that "arpeggio" is derived from "arpa," the Italian for harp.

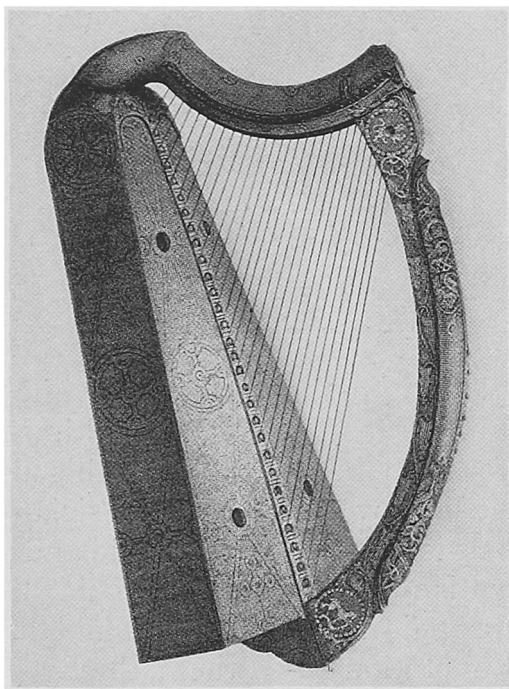
And now that there has set in a healthy revival of harp playing both in public and private, it has also been found that there is an ample and com-

prehensive repertoire of music for this charming instrument, a repertoire not only of original compositions by the earlier players, like Parish-Alvars, but also of arrangements from the great composers and operatic transcriptions, so that a harp-player need never be at a loss for program selections. Moreover, the older repertoire constantly is being added to, especially by the modern French composers, who have been quick to appreciate the beauty of

this classic instrument in its improved modern form. Besides harp solos, and music for two or more harps, there are combinations, too numerous to mention, for harp and other instruments—harp and organ, harp and piano, harp and violin, harp and cello, harp and flute and harp with violin and cello, sometimes with an organ added. Indeed the variety is infinite, while for accompanying the voice the harp has advan-

tages distinctly its own and possessed by no other instrument.

There are today many professional harpists, both men and women, who are engaged for orchestras and recitals and to play in church. Around Easter time the demand for harp-players by the churches is too great to be met. THE LOTUS is more interested in the amateur side to the revival of the harp. From this point of view, the instrument appeals especially to women. One rea-



Harp of Mary, Queen of Scots

son already has been given; the beauty of the harp itself and the fact that the pose and motions of the player harmonise with the graceful lines of the instrument, so that harp and performer seem to adapt themselves, as if by some mysterious law of music, to each other.

There is another reason that may govern both professionals and amateurs in their choice of the harp. This is the very high standard that has been attained in pianoforte playing, so that to be a pianist, even if only a proficient amateur, requires long and severe application. It is a fact that an agreeable proficiency on the harp can be attained in a comparatively short time. This is due largely to the circumstance that in the modern double pedal action changes of key are accomplished by working the pedals, so that the fingering for all keys is

the same. There is no "stopping" of strings with the fingers, as with the violin, for example. So far as the player's technique is concerned, the strings are open, save in the playing of harmonics. The advantages enumerated, together with the sentimental interest that attaches to the harp as such and the fact that if there are two or

three players of stringed instruments in a family, the addition of a harp creates a very efficient string orchestra, easily accounts for the lively interest that is again being taken in the instrument.

But there is a further reason for its growing popularity in its more frequent

use in orchestra and opera, which causes its beauty of tone to become known to an ever-widening circle. The harp was rarely employed by classical composers and then only for what might be called historical effect. Thus it is introduced in Gluck's "Orfeo" when Orpheus is supposed to strike his lyre. Handel used it in the first version of his "Esther" and Beethoven in "Prometheus" for the same purpose; and this is true of Méhul's "Joseph," Spontini's "La Vestale" and Rossini's "Moïse."



Harp of George III

Far different is the employment of the harp by Meyerbeer and its broad accompanying chords in *Roi du ciel* in "Le Prophète," or by Gounod in *Anges purs et radieux* in "Faust;" by Liszt in his Hungarian rhapsodies, where the harp takes the place of the cimbalá of the Gypsy band; in his "Dante" symphony where he intro-

duces the glissando with fine effect to symbolise the rising shades of Francesca da Rimini and her lover; and in his "Mephisto" waltz, where what are believed to be the first glissando effects for harp with orchestra are found.

At the beginning of Berlioz's "Harold" symphony the harp forms the only accompaniment to the solo viola, and an exquisite use of the harmonics on the harp, with their faint tinkle, is to be found in the Danse des Sylphes in Berlioz's "Damnation de Faust." Indeed from the time of Berlioz the harp may be said to have been appreciated for its own sake as an instrument of the orchestra.

But it is the frequent and effective employment of the harp by Wagner that has made it almost a fixture in the modern orchestra and has stimulated its use as a solo instrument. In "Rheingold" Wagner employs no less than six harps. It is related that when, at the rehearsals for the Munich production of "Rheingold," the principal harpist protested that some of the passages were unplayable, the composer exclaimed, "You don't expect me to play the harp, too, do you?"

Wagner also uses the instrument historically, as in the accompaniments to the singing of the minstrels in "Tannhauser." But, besides the shimmering rainbow bridge passage in "Rheingold" he introduces it in many places with great skill to enhance the beauty of his scores. A noteworthy example of his sensitiveness to tone-colour is the combination of the harp with other instruments in the Magic Fire Scene in "Walküre," so as to heighten the realistic effect of the passage. In the music to *Brünnhilde's* awakening

two solo harps are employed by him.

The important harp solo introducing the second scene of the first act of Donizetti's "Lucia" must not be forgotten, nor the use of the harp in "Aida." The instrument has a fine and grateful part to play in Brahms' songs for female chorus with two horns and harp. One of the loveliest harp effects in modern music is found near the beginning of "L'Après-midi d'un Faune," by Debussy, who has a most sympathetic appreciation of the beauty of the instrument.

No longer is it necessary for the poet to plead:

When the light of my song is o'er,
Then take my harp to the ancient hall,
Hang it up at the friendly door
Where weary travellers love to call.
Then, if some bard who roams forsaken
Revive its soft notes in passing along,
Oh, let one thought of its master awaken
Your warmest smile for the child of song.

The harp was taken down long ago—by such virtuosos as Bochsá, Chatterton, Parish-Alvars, from whose hands it has passed to artists like Carlos Salzedo, of the Metropolitan Opera House orchestra, Ada Sassoli and other leading harp-players of today. It is never apt to be hung up again. That might very well have happened to the old Irish or Welsh harp, which was small and not likely to break the peg or bend the nail. But one does not risk the fall of a modern instrument, such as the superb American harp on which Salzedo plays. Moreover the virtuoso must always have his harp at hand, since he is apt to be asked at any moment "to revive its soft notes" for the benefit of friends, if he be an amateur, or concert audience, if a professional.